DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 466 526 CS 511 206

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TITLE	Outcasts Searching for a Place To Fit: A Study of "Frankenstein" by Mary Shelley and "Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes" by Chris Crutcher.
PUB DATE	2002-05-09
NOTE	20p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescent Literature; Class Activities; Classics (Literature); *English Instruction; High Schools; *Individual Development; Learning Activities; Lesson Plans; *Novels; Student Educational Objectives; *Thematic Approach; *Units of Study
IDENTIFIERS	Crutcher (Chris); *Frankenstein; *Response to Literature; Shelley (Mary)

ABSTRACT

All people have to deal with feelings of loneliness, isolation, fear, and lack of acceptance, especially in the teenage years. Both of the novels "Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes" and "Frankenstein" deal with these issues. By 10th grade, students are really searching for who they are and what they want out of life. It is especially important to these adolescents that they have a place where they belong and feel comfortable. In both these novels the main characters are isolated because of their appearances. In "Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes," Eric "Moby" Calhoune is extremely overweight, and Sarah Byrnes is grotesquely scarred from severe burns she received as a child. In "Frankenstein," the monster is so terrifying that even his creator cannot bear to look at him. Both books deal with religious implications, and both books deal with father motifs. The novels contain difficult subjects to discuss, but they can raise questions in students' minds and help them to analyze and determine how they view the world and their role in it. This curriculum unit, designed for use in grade 10, provides unit objectives for each novel and for the combined novels; suggests diverse motivation ideas for the teacher to implement; offers sample motivation quizzes; presents student activities; gives general discussion questions for the teacher to use; and presents study guide questions for the students. The unit also provides a vocabulary quiz; suggests follow-up activities; discusses evaluation; and offers several sample tests. (Contains a list of 18 resources.) (NKA)

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Outcasts Searching for a Place to Fit

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May 9, 2002

A study of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher

For Grade 10

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Rationale

All people have to deal with feelings of loneliness, isolation, fear, and lack of acceptance, especially in the teenage years. Both *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* and *Frankenstein* deal with these issues. By tenth grade, students are really searching for who they are and what they want out of life. They are exploring relationships and priorities. It is especially important to these adolescents that they have a place where they belong and feel comfortable. If people are fat, skinny, tall, short, have acne, or any other distinguishing feature, they are made all too aware of the fact. In both these novels the main characters are isolated because of their appearances. In *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*, Eric "Moby" Calhoune is extremely overweight, and Sarah Byrnes is grotesquely scarred from severe burns she received as a child. In *Frankenstein*, the monster is so terrifying that even his own creator cannot bear to look at him.

Both books also deal with religious implications. Questions about "playing God" are raised as well as the idea of how our lives are or are not governed by religion and what this means for different people. This is a hard subject to discuss, even for adults but it can raise questions in the students' minds and help them to analyze and determine how they view the world and their role in it.

Another similarity is that both books deal with father motifs. The creature in *Frankenstein* is abandoned by his "father." Eric's father left him and his mother long ago and Sarah's father is a cruel abuser. Unfortunately, both these circumstances are too common in today's society and reading about them might serve as a sort of bibliotherapy for some students.

Unit Objectives

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes

The Students Will Be Able To:

1. Discuss the implications of letting religious beliefs impact classroom discussion and management
2. Recognize some of the signs of child abuse
3. Summarize the basic plot structure
4. Examine the characters, how they relate to one another, and their similarities and differences
5. Develop an understanding of what friendship means to those in the story and what it means to the students, themselves

Frankenstein

The Students Will Be Able To:

1. Examine issues, such as cloning, that are related to breakthroughs in science and discuss their pros and cons
2. Summarize the basic plot structure
3. Observe the interactions between Victor and the monster and discuss their similarities and differences
4. Better understand the use of foreshadowing in a work and find examples
5. Consider the issue of humanity and what defines us as human beings

Combined Novels

The Students Will Be Able To:

1. Compare and contrast the main characters of the two stories

2. Explain the role religion plays in each novel
3. Become aware of society's mistreatment of those different from the majority (outcasts of society)
4. Recognize their own roles in perpetuating such mistreatment
5. Discuss which character they relate to most and why
6. Articulate the importance of theme, point of view, and symbolism in the narratives

Motivations

1. On the first day of each book start the class with a quick quiz to make them start thinking about any pre-conceived notions they might have that relate to the book. The "quiz" should not take longer than five minutes.

2. Place a question on the board that will be the focus of the day's discussion or lesson. The students will take notice of it as soon as they walk in the room and will be required to do a quick-write response to it.

3. Enter the classroom as a character from one of the books. This is an attention grabber and will leave the students wondering what will happen in your class next.

4. Have some facts and statistics projected onto the screen related to the day's topic of discussion. For example, child abuse is an issue in *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*.
   "Most abused and neglected children never come to the attention of the authorities."

5. Have some music playing as the students enter the classroom. Some selections and artists are mentioned throughout *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* such as Buddy Holly, The Byrds "Turn, Turn, Turn" or play some violin music as mentioned in *Frankenstein.*

6. Begin the lesson with some sort of personal story. For this unit, share a time with the class when you felt you were an outcast or did not fit in with the crowd.

7. Make a promise to the class: "By the end of today, you will have a better understanding of what it means to be a victim of abuse or neglect."

8. Have written on the board "What I know about (the character of your choice: Sarah Byrnes, Moby, the monster, Victor)" and let the class brainstorm for about five minutes.

9. Pose a question to the class: "How many of you have ever wanted to totally escape from your life and trials?" This can be responded to in a journal or class discussion.

10. Enter the classroom with some sort of prop that relates to the book you are studying. It could be a newspaper (such as *Crispy Pork Rinds*), something to do with swimming, a piece of science equipment borrowed from one of your colleagues to signify an experiment as in *Frankenstein*

Sample Motivation "Quiz" for *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*

True or False:

1. Children are too mean to each other.
2. No one should ever be made to feel like an outcast.
3. The justice system in the United States is too easy on child abusers.
4. Fat people shouldn't try to "fit in" with other students.
5. Bullies shouldn't be allowed to attend school with other children.
6. Students should be allowed to publish a newspaper saying whatever they want to say.
7. There should be a required class in every high school that discusses contemporary issues.
8. Teachers should be held responsible for their actions, even if they are trying to protect a student.
9. People should do whatever they have to do to protect their friends.
10. Everyone can change over time – even bullies.

Sample Motivation "Quiz" for *Frankenstein*

True or False:

1. All scientist do is look through a microscope in a laboratory.
2. Monsters are evil, dangerous creatures.
3. All people are basically mean and cruel.
4. It is impossible to bring a dead body back to life.
5. Love is more important that a person's ambition or career goals.
6. Murder is a crime, no matter what the circumstances.
7. If a person is treated with cruelty and insensitivity, he will act brutally towards others also.
8. It is alright to reject a person because he/she is physically ugly.
9. Taking revenge against someone who betrayed you is fair and justified.
10. Scientists have no right to clone or reproduce a living thing from DNA.

Student Activities

1. Character mapping is a good way to organize information about the individual characters and is useful in comparing them as well. This can be done throughout the reading of the book.

2. Students can do group research projects about current issues that relate to the novels and present them to the class. Possible topics include but are not limited to child abuse, obesity in teens, suicide, and cloning.

3. Socratic seminars are simple round-table sort of discussions. Students can share opinions, beliefs, and ask questions concerning plot, them, or any issues the books deal with.

4. Dramatic presentations can be done in groups where each group is responsible for presenting a different section of the story to the rest of the class.

5. The students can create their own newspaper similar to *Crispy Pork Rinds*. However, the teacher would have to be certain that the articles written were appropriate and not harmful to anyone.

6. The students could design a practice regiment for their favorite sport or activity. Some students might have more experience with this than others so this activity should probably be an option with some of the others.

7. The student can set up a mock trial to determine:
    a. Moby and Ellerby's responsibility in Mark's suicide attempt.
    b. If Victor Frankenstein is guilty of causing the monster emotional and physical distress and of negligence and malpractice.

8. The students could write another chapter or letter continuing one of the stories. They should consider what happened to the monster after he left Victor on the boat or what happened to Moby, Jody, Sarah, and Ellerby after graduation.

9. Students can present formal debates focusing on issues from the stories. There should be an affirmative and negative side and timed amounts of speaking from both sides for speeches and rebuttals. Research time is needed for this project.

10. The students could select an issue and explain how both novels relate to it, how perspectives might differ, and explain with which the student agrees more.

General Discussion Questions for the Teacher

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes

1. Why do you think Sarah Byrnes just stopped talking?
2. What kid of trust issues does she have and why does she have them?
3. Why do you think Eric was so overweight for so long? Do you think his mother should have done something?
4. Do you think the world is a good or bad place (Mrs. Lemry's question on p. 15)?
5. Why is Sarah so important to Eric? How do you view their friendship? How does it relate to your concept of friendship?
6. Why do you think Virgil Byrnes hurt his daughter? Can people like this ever be helped? Are they capable of love at all?
7. Why did Dale Thornton act the way he did when he was in school? What, if anything, did he wish to prove?
8. What do you think Crutcher is trying to say about religion?
9. Why did Eric have such an open relationship with his mother? How does this compare to your family?
10. How do you think living with the Lemrys will affect Sarah?

Frankenstein

1. Many characters travel throughout the novel. Why is this significant?
2. Why do we get so much background on Victor's life?
3. Why does Shelly use different forms to give the reader information? Does this help or detract from the story?
4. The story was originally formed in a contest to see who could make the most horrifying story. Do you think it accomplished this goal? Why or why not?
5. Who do you relate to more: Victor or the monster? Why?
6. One of the tragedies in the novel is the refusal of other characters to recognize the monster as a full human being. What qualities define humanity?
7. When *Frankenstein* was first published in 1818, it had mixed reactions. Not everyone understood or enjoyed it. Today we look at it as a classic. Why do some important pieces of literature not receive value right away while others that are immediately popular eventually fade away?
8. What does it mean to "play God"? Was Victor guilty of this? Why or why not?
9. What, if any, responsibilities did Victor have to the monster?
10. What do you think happens to the monster after he leaves? Does he really go to die? Is that possible?

Study Guide Questions for Students

Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes

1. Why did Sarah Byrnes insist on everyone calling her by her full name?
2. Explain the conflicting viewpoints of Christianity in the novel.
3. How did Sarah Byrnes and Dale Thornton become friends? Why did they appeal to one another?
4. What did Sarah's mother represent to her? How did this change once they were reunited?
5. How does Eric feel about his nickname?
6. Why doesn't Sarah trust other adults the way Eric does? What does this show about Sarah? About Eric?

Frankenstein

1. In what different formats is the novel written?
2. Give some examples of foreshadowing in the story.
3. Describe how Victor's obsession in creating the monster affected him.
4. Discuss the role that nature plays in Shelley's novel.
5. Analyze the use of setting throughout the story. For example, how does the use of the Arctic as the setting for Victor Frankenstein's final confrontation with his creation affect mood, tone, and the reader's reaction?
6. What was the monster's explanation for wanting a mate?

Combined Novels

1. How do fathers and father figures contribute to the stories?

2. Which two characters (one from each story) do you find to be the most similar and why?
3. Discuss the theme of isolation in the novels.
4. What are two other common themes the novels share? Explain.
5. Explain how religion plays a part in both of the novels.

Vocabulary

I see little point in making students memorize lists of vocabulary words just so they can pass quizzes. I will write a word and definition on the board every day to give the constant exposure, but overall, I will avoid assigning vocabulary to be looked up. I will provide my students with their own vocabulary notebooks. It is their responsibility to look up whatever words they do not understand and define them or use them in sample sentences as they see fit. I will never collect or even look at these notebooks. They are solely for the purpose of helping the students. However, this does not mean that vocabulary will not be on quizzes. I expect the students to understand what they are reading and this is not possible if they do not put the simple effort into vocabulary. I feel that students learn more when they are responsible for searching out the information themselves. While I will probably not ask them to write out the strict definitions, I will expect them to gain the basic knowledge of the words they read and will quiz them in other ways. Here are some sample questions:

Matching

Match the definition given with the appropriate word

1. Marked by or disposed to doing good
2. Causing fear, dread, or apprehension: tending to wonder
3. Painfully affecting the feelings

a. anonymous
b. benevolent
c. formidable
d. obsession
e. poignant

Short Answer

4. Use the word "progeny" in a sentence that shows understanding of its meaning.

Follow-up Activities

One of the most important follow-ups you can do is to be certain that all students understand the material and discussions. Often, students are not comfortable with raising their hands and admitting their confusion so a question box helps to provide a solution to this. Give students an index card and the opportunity to write a question or though. If they do not want to write anything, have them write "I am comfortable with the material at this point" or something to that effect. Then go around and collect all the cards. Sort through them privately and the next day, you can address any concerns or problems you read.

Another idea is to have students bring in current events to share with the class relating to recent topics of discussion in class. This not only allows students to see issues from school relating to the real world but also forces them to be reading, whether it is a newspaper, magazine, or Internet article.

A favorite follow-up for most students is a movie. There are many movies made from the subject of Frankenstein. After watching a movie, you can compare and contrast it to the book. You might be surprised to learn that some students may have enjoyed the book more than the movie!

Evaluation

Students will be evaluated in a variety of ways. First, I expect class participation. This will be based partially on attendance but even more so on effort and volunteering. As students participate, I will check by their name in my book each time they do so. These marks can serve as bonus points should the students' grades be borderline. This grade is 10% of the total.

I feel that journal entries are very important because they allow the students to touch on some ideas or themes that they do not always have the opportunity to discuss in class. Though sometimes I will assign a specific topic about which to write, I will have a daily journaling time at the end of each class (whatever is not completed is homework). Journals will not be judged on mechanics or neatness, though I do expect them to be legible. I am looking for personal reactions, thoughts, and effort. I also am checking that they have all entries completed. Journals will be worth 20%.

While I do not especially enjoy quizzes, they are often necessary as a way to verify that students are keeping up with the readings. Quizzes will consist of five short answer questions and can include vocabulary. They will be worth another 20%.

I will give one exam after the class completes each book. The exams will contain a variety of questions including fill in the blank, multiple choice, short answer, and essay. The exams will be worth 15% each for a total of 30%.

The last assignment will be a project of the students' choice. It will be presented to the class and done in groups. I will be looking for visual aids, accurate research and sources, and equal participation from all group members. This project is worth 20% and can be selected from some of the activities mentioned earlier in the unit.

Sample Quiz

1. How did Mark Brittain end up in the hospital?

2. What did Jody reveal first to Eric and then to the class?

3. Use the word "liability in a sentence to display your knowledge of the word.

4. Where did Sarah stay once she left the hospital?

5. From what Sarah said in class, would you think that she is pro-life or pro-choice? Why?

Sample Exam

Multiple Choice

1. The first letter is written to a woman named Margaret and is from
    a. Captain Walton
    b. Victor Frankenstein
    c. Henry Clerval
    d. Elizabeth Lavenza

2. Victor was
    a. German
    b. Genovese
    c. Lithuanian
    d. Austrian

3. Which teacher of Victor's encouraged his studies?
    a. Cornelius Agrippa
    b. M. Waldman
    c. Professor Krempe
    d. Albertus Magnus

4. When Victor first began his studies intensely, what was the result?
    a. the monster
    b. a severe illness
    c. a visit from Elizabeth
    d. a trip home

5. Who was the monster's first victim?
    a. Henry Clerval
    b. Victor's father
    c. Justine
    d. William

6. Who was found guilty of the murder?
    a. Henry Clerval
    b. Victor's father
    c. Justine
    d. William

7. what book did the monster relate to most?
    a. *Plutarch's Lives*
    b. *Sorrows of Werter*
    c. *Paradise Lost*
    d. None - he never learned to read

Fill in the Blank

1. Victor vowed to _____ the deaths the monster caused.

2. _____ was Victor's best friend.

3. Safie and Felix's parents met when their mother was captured and made a _____ by the Turks.

4. The monster was _____ when he tried to help a young girl who fell into the stream.

5. The monster promised Victor, "I will be with you on your _____."

6. The monster's words (mentioned above) are an example of _____.

7. The monster's last victim was _____.

Short Answer

1. What was the monster's explanation for wanting a mate?

2. What are the different formats in which the novel is written?

Essay

Discuss the qualities of humanity and whether or not the monster qualifies.

Resources

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